



# IN THE REALM OF THE CENSORS

● As the case against rock music hots up in American courts obsessed with the power of music over young minds, STEVEN WELLS talked Channel 4 into stumping up the airtime and the airmiles to launch the fullest investigation yet into the censorship debate. Here's his report.

“Everything sinful that enters your body enters through the holes in your body...”

The silver-haired, Benny Hill-sized Reverend Christian A Brothers runs Freedom Village—home in upstate New York for abused teenagers.

“You couldn't keep things out of the holes in your body, that's why you're here...”

The children he's haranguing have just sworn allegiance to a US flag held proudly in place in the belt-harness of a white-shirted, crop-haired youth. Then they swore allegiance to the similarly jutting 'Christian flag'. In his heavy Southern twang the Reverend lays down the law.

“The Devil has found a tremendous vehicle to get his ideas in through the holes in your body—namely your ears! Rock music!”

In my specially-bought M&S suit I flew to the USA to make a documentary for Channel 4—*Dancing With The Devil*—about rock music censorship. We had started by filming an interview in London with the lead singer of *Deicide*, a band who exist “to create the most evillest music and to gain entrance into the seven gates of Hell...”

And we ended up freezing our bollocks off at a record burning in Minneapolis hosted by the Rev Steve Peters, a man who wouldn't let Luther Campbell of 2 Live Crew copulate with his dog.

“That album had 63 f—words on it. I wouldn't let my dog listen to this,” he says pointing at the sleeve of ‘As Rude As They Wanna Be’.

“I wouldn't trust this guy sexually with my pet dog... I'd better not say that, it'll get me into trouble...”

We interviewed the Rev Peters' brother whilst his normally inseparable sibling Dan was away opening a TV station. Hovering in the background was another Rev whose church houses the *Truth About Rock* offices. He's an ex-TV newsreader and he still has the chiselled good looks, the Ken haircut and the salon tan. He invites us to help ourselves to the anti-abortion literature and the little pink plastic foetuses from the table at the back. Then it's time to go record burning.

Our researcher, Simon, gets to sit in the Peters' van in between Steve and his wife.

“And what are you going to say when you meet Jesus Christ?” they ask him. The trip is full of moments like these—where the pastor asks us all to close our eyes in silent prayer, or wave our arms about and sing along or come to the front if we want to be saved... A band in shirts and ties and sensible slacks plays



John Tanner blew his face off with a shotgun after listening to *Black Sabbath* and *Grand Funk Railroad*. We know the feeling.

what is definitely *not* the Devil's music as Mr and Mrs Peters take the stage in front of the audience of young, clean-cut Christians.

“There is a WAR in America today! A CIVIL WAR!” shouts Steve. Kerblam! It's a slick show, using slides and music to hammer the point into the skulls of any of the collected Christian youth who might secretly listen to *Slayer*.

“Slayer?” asks Steve. “Hands up anybody here who's a fan of Slayer...” No takers. “Slayer have a song called ‘Necrophilia’—it's about raping corpses. Hands up all of you who think it's important that we have lots of songs about raping corpses in America today?”

“Why don't they have songs about being true to your school?” asks Steve. “Why don't they have songs about eating your brussels sprouts?” There's a strong streak of gay-bashing to the show. Steve sneers at ‘Girl George’ and when he tells the audience that, apparently, *Angie Bowie* once discovered David in bed with *Mick Jagger* there are groans and hisses and at least one disbelieving—“No!”—from the audience.

Meanwhile, Emma the producer is pulling her hair out because the proposed record burning which she desperately wants to get on film is under threat. The Rev, whose church this is, is more than a little worried about the *environmental* damage a stack of burning black plastic might cause. He and Steve compromise. Only the sleeves get torched.

“How 'n hell do you make this look like Nuremberg?” I ask Emma as Steve and the Christian kiddies dance around the small pile of lighter-fuelled sleeves. It is 40 below and my face doesn't work any more.

“GIVE USA JAY!” roars Steve. “And an E and an S and a U and another S.”

“WHAT DOES THAT SPELL?”

“JESUS!”

“WHAT DO THESE ROCKERS NEED?”

“JESUS!”

With the adults all sheltering inside from the cold, discipline is a little hard to maintain. Some kids start flinging records like frisbees, throwing them to the ground, jumping on them. The air is full of brittle black shards.

Afterwards Steve tells us about his first record burning.

“There was a guy there putting some Cat Stevens records on the fire. I said—‘why are you doing that? I never mentioned Cat Stevens in my talk?’”

The guy just looked at me.

“Personal reasons,” he said.

I'VE BEEN wanting to make this documentary for the last six years—ever since the *Parents Music Resource Center* first raised their bouffant-encrusted heads above the parapet. I end up presenting *Dance With The Devil*, constantly arguing with Emma, trying to make it into a Swells-style rant and rave at the fuddy-duddies. She goes for a more balanced approach—which is perhaps just as well really.

We visit the PMRC offices in Washington where spokeswoman *Jennifer Norwood*, visibly hostile to any questions that attempt to reveal the ever-so sensible PMRC's links to the loony Christian right, stonewalls and dodges like a seasoned media pro. She plays the liberal card and accuses rock

music of being racist (*Public Enemy* and *Guns N' Roses*) and sexist (just about everyone). It's all pretty useless. Skimming through the PMRC mail-out literature proves far more fruitful. I blag a copy of *The Downbeat Effects Of Music On An Upbeat Generation*—a slim volume produced by the National Committee On Music.

It is full of curious mistakes—the lead singer of T-Rex is misspelt as “Marc Bolen”, *The Dead Kennedys* are described as a “heavy metal group” and we learn to our horror that “An outdated teenage fad was to take raw eggs to concerts and put them on a stage in front of the band. At intermission, the eggs, hard-boiled by the music, were eaten by fans.”

The source of this piece of information? The Rev *Bob Larsen*, a veteran rock basher and the spiritual father of the new breed. But it gets weirder. We learn that mice subjected to “jarring” rock music suffer “structural changes in their brain cells”.

And there's a full page photo of some uprooted plants. A healthy looking plant was played *Shankar East Indian Temple Music*. An almost as healthy looking plant was played *Bach* and a feeble, stunted little weed with puny roots was tortured with *Led Zeppelin*,



Judas Priest: Any messages for your fans out there boys?



Ozzie Osbourne: *Public Enemy Number One* (well at least it's a number one!)

Vanilla Fudge and Jimi Hendrix. This is what rock music is doing to your brain.

IN SAN Francisco, *Jello Biafra* was excited as a puppy when we told him we'd been “Norwooded”. He agreed to be interviewed between two gigantic Longhorn skulls. Lit from underneath and sporting his new, evil-looking goatee beard, he looked the very model of a modern Satanic rock star. Soundbite us, Oh High Priest of Harmful Matter.

“What we have is McCarthyism with a smiley face (BRILLIANT!) where people suspected of being ‘soft on porn’, ‘soft on drugs’, ‘soft on gays’ or not believing in fundamentalist Christianity are slowly being hounded out of their jobs and their right to say what they believe... Truth emerges out of a healthy clash of ideas and if we start censoring people because they are so-called Satanic adherents, where might they draw the line next?” CUT! In the can.

When *John Tanner* was 16 he took a shotgun and blew his face off. He survived but is disfigured. His case is often quoted by the anti-rock Revs as proof of the harmful effects of rock music.

“I pretty much sat in my room all day and listened to *Black Sabbath* and *Grand Funk Railroad* and I'd worked myself into that state of mind that I would just pick out everything that was really depressing.”

“I got into an argument with my girlfriend on the phone and then I figured, you know, that was it, and went upstairs and grabbed the shotgun and put it under my jaw and said—‘Oh, God, I'm coming home’—and just hit the trigger.

“I guess I'd have to say that, erm, you know the... the words did have a big influence on me.”

Aside from the obscenity raps faced by 2 Live Crew in Florida, the big case of last year was the prosecution brought by the parents of two youths who blew their heads off with a sawn-off shotgun after allegedly having been told to do so by *Judas Priest* records.

The band were adamant if there were hidden messages “people would be dropping like flies all over the world! And if we'd have had the ability to put subliminal messages there we'd have said ‘BUY MORE RECORDS’ or something like that...”

The case collapsed after singer *Rob Halford* played the judge a tape he'd made of other “hidden messages” that appeared when the album *Stained Class* was played backwards including “Hey, Ma, the chair's broken” and “It's so fishy, personally I'll own it”. So easy is it, in fact, to find “hidden messages” on any record played backwards that several DJs now regularly feature

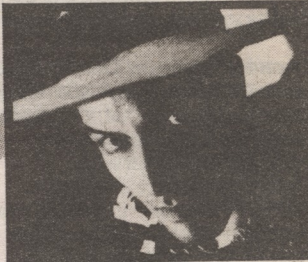
this in their shows, notably *Chris Morris* (formerly of *GLR*) and *NME*'s very own *David Quantick* and *Terry Staunton* on BBC Radio 5 recently.

1991 is the year that *Ozzie Osbourne* gets it in the neck. At least 15 sets of bereaved parents whose suicided sons allegedly listened to *Ozzie* are awaiting the outcome of a case brought by a Mr *Waller* of *Fitzgerald*, Georgia, whose son *Michael* shot himself in front of friends at a party two months before his 17th birthday.

“The song that he played last was *Ozzie Osbourne*'s ‘Suicide Solution’,” says Mr *Waller*. “And then, just like someone turned a bright light on me, I realised what he had said to me two weeks earlier—‘O! Oz has the solution’—and I realised where he had gotten the idea to commit suicide.”

*Trish Heimer* of the *Record Industry Artists Of America* is adamant that it's not *Ozzie* that's the problem when a kid kills himself.

“No, that poor kid had tremendous problems before, during and after listening to rock music... People are looking for scapegoats, if your kid is sitting in his room listening to the same record over and over for eight hours, I don't care what that record is, you might want to think about knocking on the door and saying—‘Johnny, is everything OK?’”



Jello Biafra: Rock's defender of the faith



Killer Jim Hardy: *Venom* made him do it. Or did they?

But what about the case of our last interviewee, *Jim Hardy*? A heavy metal fan currently serving life without parole in the Missouri State Penitentiary, he and a friend beat a schoolmate to death with baseball bats and dumped the body in a water cistern.

“We played some *Venom* on the way there, just to get us in the mood, I guess you could say... We looked for the lyrics that would justify what we were doing. The words of the songs did have a big influence on me. I was totally committed to listening to *Black Sabbath*.”

So *Ozzie* made you do it?

“That's a cop out to me. I mean I really feel that's a cop out. It just doesn't make any sense at all. I mean that's just like some cattle roper getting drunk at the bar and finding out that his old lady is cheating on him and going out and killing three or four people and people are gonna say, you know, did Country music make you want to go out and kill that guy? That's just kind of a cop out. I mean, sure, it might have given us the heart to do it but it didn't cause us to do it and that's the important question.”

● *Dancing With The Devil* is broadcast on Channel 4, Friday, April 19.